More Trivia

Logan Pearsall Smith

MORE TRIVIA

By

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A GREETING

'WHAT funny clothes you wear, dear Readers! And your hats! The thought of your hats does make me laugh. And I think your sex-theories quite horrid.'

Thus across the void of Time I send, with a wave of my hand, a greeting to that quaint, remote, outlandish, unborn people whom we call Posterity, and whom I, like other very great writers, claim as my readers—urging them to hurry up and get born, that they may have the pleasure of reading 'More Trivia.'

MORE TRIVIA

REASSURANCE

I LOOK at my overcoat and my hat hanging in the hall with reassurance; for although I go out of doors with one individuality to-day, when yesterday I had quite another, yet my clothes keep my various selves buttoned up together, and enable all these otherwise irreconcilable aggregates of psychological phenomena to pass themselves off as one person.

BEFORE opening the front-door I paused, for a moment of profound consideration. Dim-lit, shadowy, full of menace and unimaginable chances, stretched all around my door the many-peopled streets. I could hear ominous and muffled, the tides of multitudinous traffic, sounding along their ways. Was I equipped for the navigation of those waters, armed and ready to adventure out into that dangerous world again?

Gloves? Money? Cigarettes? Matches? Yes; and I had an umbrella for its tempests, and a latchkey for my safe return.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

SHOVING and pushing, and shoved and pushed, a dishonoured bag of bones about London, or carted like a herring in a box through tunnels in the clay beneath it, as I bump my head in a bus, or hang, half-suffocated, from a greasy strap in the Underground, I dream, like other Idealists and Saints and Social Thinkers, of a better world than this, a world that might be, a City of Heaven brought down at last to earth.

One footman flings open the portals of my palace in that New Jerusalem for me; another unrolls a path of velvet to the enormous motor which floats me, swift and silent, through the city traffic—I leaning back like God on hallowed cushions, smoking a big cigar.

FACES

ALMOST always the streets are full of dreary-looking people; sometimes for weeks on end the poor face-hunter returns unblest from his expeditions, with no provision with which to replenish his daydream-larder.

Then one day the plenty is all too great; there are Princesses at the street-crossings, Queens in the taxi-cabs, Beings fair as the day-spring on the tops of busses; and the Gods themselves can be seen promenading up and down Piccadilly.

THE OBSERVER

TALK of ants! It's the precise habits, the incredible proceedings of human insects I like to note and study.

Walking to-day, like a stranger dropped upon this planet, towards Victoria, I chanced to see a female of this species, a certain Mrs. Jones of my acquaintance, approaching from the opposite direction. Immediately I found myself performing the oddest set of movements and manœuvres. I straightened my back and simpered, I lifted my hat in the air; and then, seizing the paw of this female, I moved it up and down several times, giving utterance to a set formula of articulated sounds.

These anthropological gestures and vocalisations, and my automatic performance of them, reminded me that it was after all from inside one of them, that I was observing these Bipeds.

CHAOS

PUNCTUAL, commonplace, keeping all appointments, as I go my round in the obvious world, a bit of Chaos and old Night seems to linger on inside me; a dark bewilderment of mind, a nebulous sea of speculation, a looming of shadowy universes out of nothing, and their collapse, as in a dream.

THE GHOST

WHEN people talk of Ghosts and Hauntings, I never mention the Apparition by which I am pestered, the Phantom that shadows me about the streets, the image or spectre, so familiar, so like myself, and yet so abhorrent, which lurks in the plate-glass of shop-windows, or leaps out of mirrors to waylay me.

THE HOUR-GLASS

AT the corner of Oakley Street I stopped for a moment's chat with my neighbour, Mrs. Wheble, who was waiting there for a bus.

'Do tell me,' she asked, 'what you have got in that odd-looking parcel?'

'It's an hour-glass,' I said, taking it out of its paper wrapping. 'I saw it in a shop in the King's Road. I've always wanted an hour-glass to measure time by. What a mystery Time really is, when you think of it! See, the sands are running now while we are talking. I've got here in my hand the most potent, the most enigmatic, the most fleeting of all essences—Time, the sad cure for all our sorrows—but I say! There's your bus just starting. You'll miss it if you don't look out!'

THE LATCHKEY

I WAS astonished, I was almost horror-struck by the sight of the New Moon at the end of the street. In bewilderment and Blake-like wonder I stood and gazed at it on my door-step. For what was I doing there; I, a wanderer, a pilgrim, a nomad of the desert, with no home save where the evening found me —what was my business on that doorstep; at what commonplace had the Moon caught me with a latchkey in my hand?

GOOD PRACTICE

WE met in an omnibus last evening. 'And where are you going now?' she asked, as she looked at me with amusement.

'I am going, if the awful truth must be told, to dine in Grosvenor Square.'

'Lord!' she colloquially replied, 'and what do you do that for?'

'I do it because I am invited. And besides,' I went on, 'let me remind you of what the Persian Mystics say of the Saints—that the Saints are sometimes rich, that God sometimes endows them with an outward show of wealth to hide them from the profane.'

'Oh, does He? Hides them in Grosvenor Square?'

'Very well, then, I shall tell you the real truth; I shall tell you my real reason for going to dine there. Do you remember what Diogenes answered when they asked him why he had asked for a statue at the public expense?'

'No; what did he say?'

'He said—but I must explain another time. I have to get off here. Good-night.'

I paused, however, at the door of the bus. 'He said,' I called back, '"I am practising Disappointment." That—you know whom I mean?—was his answer.'

EVASION

'WHAT do you think of the International Situation?' asked that foreign Countess, with her foreign, fascinating smile.

Was she a Spy? I felt I must be careful.

'What do I think?' I evasively echoed; and then, carried away by the profound and melancholy interest of this question, 'Think?' I queried, 'do I ever really think? Is there anything inside my head but cotton-wool? How can I call myself a Thinker? What am I anyhow?' I pursued the sad inquiry: 'A noodle, a pigwidgeon, a ninnyhammer, a bubble on the wave, a leaf in the wind, Madame!'

DINING OUT

WHEN I think of Etiquette and Funerals; when I consider the euphemisms and rites and conventions and various costumes with which we invest the acts of our animal existence; when I bear in mind how elegantly we eat our victuals, and remember the series of ablutions and preparations and salutations and exclamations and manipulations I went through when I dined out last evening, I reflect what creatures we are of ceremony; how elaborate, how pompous and polite a simian Species.

FROM the corner of the dim, half-empty drawing-room where they sat, they could see, in a great mirror, the other dinner-guests linger and depart. But none of them were going on—what was the good?—to that evening party. They talked of satiety and disenchantment, of the wintry weather, of illness and old age and death.

'But what really frightens me most in life,' said one of them, 'what gives me a kind of vertigo or shiver, is—it sounds absurd, but it's simply the horror of Space, *l'épouvante sidérale*,—the dismay of Infinity, the black abysses in the Milky Way, the silence of those eternal spaces beyond the furthest stars.'

'But Time,' said another of the group, 'surely Time is a worse nightmare. Think of it! the Past with never a beginning, the Future going on for ever and ever, and the little present in which we live for a second, twinkling between these two black abysses.'

'What's wrong with me,' mused the third speaker, 'is that even the Present eludes me. I don't know what it really is; I can never catch the moment as it passes; I am always far ahead or far away behind, and always somewhere else. I am not really here now with you,

though I am talking to you. And why should I go to the party? I shouldn't be there, either, if I went. My life is all reminiscence and anticipation—if you can call it life, if I am not rather a kind of ghost, haunting a past that has ceased to be, or a future that is still more shadowy and unreal. It's ghastly in a way, this exile and isolation. But why speak of it, after all? '

They rose, and their images too were reflected in the great mirror, as they passed out of the drawing-room, and dispersed, each on his or her way, into the winter night.

I SAT there, hating the exuberance of her bust, and her high-coloured wig. And how could I listen to music in the close proximity of those loud stockings ?

Then our eyes met: in both of us the enchanted chord was touched; we both looked through the same window into Heaven. In that moment of musical, shared delight, my soul and the soul of that large lady, joined hands and sang like the morning stars together.

IN the midst of my anecdote a sudden misgiving chilled me—had I told them about this Goat before? And then as I talked there gaped upon me—abyss opening beneath abyss—a darker speculation: when goats are mentioned, do I automatically and always tell this story about the Goat at Portsmouth?

STILL I am not a pessimist, nor misanthrope, nor grumbler; I bear it all, the burden of Public Affairs, the immensity of Space, the brevity of Life, and the thought of the all-swallowing Grave—all this I put up with without impatience. I accept the common lot. And if now and then for a moment it seems too much; if I get my feet wet, or have to wait too long for tea, and my soul in these wanes of the moon cries out in French *C'est fini!* I always answer *Pazienza!* in Italian—*abbia la santa Pazienza!*

'SO of course I bought it! How could I help buying it?' Then, lifting the conversation, as with Lady Hyslop one always lifts it, to a higher level, 'this notion of Free Will,' I went on, 'the notion, for instance, that I was free to buy or not to buy that rare edition, seems, when you think of it—at least to me it seems—a wretched notion really. I like to feel that I must follow the things I desire as—how shall I put it?—as the tide follows the Moon; that my actions are due to necessary causes; that the world inside me isn't a meaningless chaos, but a world of order, like the world outside, governed by beautiful laws, as the Stars are governed.'

'Ah, how I love the Stars!' murmured Lady Hyslop. 'What things they say to me! They are the pledges of lost recognitions; the promise of ineffable mitigations.'

'Mitigations?' I gasped, feeling for a moment a little giddy. But it didn't matter: always when we meet Lady Hyslop and I have the most wonderful conversations.

'BUT one really never knows the Age one lives in. How interesting it would be,' I said to the lady next me, 'how I wish we could see ourselves as Posterity will see us!'

I have said it before, but on this occasion I was struck—almost thunder-struck—by my own remark. Like a rash enchanter, the spirit I had raised myself alarmed me. For a queer second I did see ourselves in that inevitable mirror, but cadaverous and out-of-date and palsied—a dusty set of old waxworks, simpering inanely in the lumber-room of Time.

'Better to be forgotten at once!' I exclaimed, with an emphasis that seemed to surprise the lady next me.

BUT why wasn't I born, alas, in an age of Adjectives; why can one no longer write of silver-shedding Tears and moon-tailed Peacocks, of eloquent Death, and the negro and star-enamelled Night?

WHERE?

I, WHO move and breathe and place one foot before the other, who watch the Moon wax and wane, and put off answering my letters, where shall I find the Bliss which dreams and blackbirds' voices promise, of which the waves whisper, and hand-organs in streets near Paddington faintly sing?

Does it dwell in some island of the South Seas, or far oasis among deserts and gaunt mountains; or only in those immortal gardens imagined by Chinese poets beyond the great cold palaces of the Moon?

IN THE STREET

THESE eye-encounters in the street, little touches of love-liking; faces that ask, as they pass, 'Are you my new lover?' Shall I one day—in Park Lane or Oxford Street perhaps—see the unknown Face I dread and look for?

THE ABBEY AT NIGHT

AND as at night I went past the Abbey, saw its walls towering high and solemn among the autumn stars, I pictured to myself the white population in the vast darkness of its interior—all that hushed people of Heroes—; not dead, I would think them, but animated with a still kind of life; and at last, after all their intolerable toils, the sounding tumult of battle, and perilous seapaths, resting there, tranquil and satisfied and glorious, amid the epitaphs and allegorical figures of their tombs —those high-piled, trophied, shapeless Abbey tombs, that long ago they toiled for, and laid down their gallant lives to win.

'YES, as you say, life is so full of disappointment, disillusion! More and more I ask myself, as I grow older, what is the good of it all? We dress, we go out to dinner,' I went on, 'but surely we walk in a vain show. How good this asparagus is! I often say asparagus is the most delicious of all vegetables. And yet, I don't know—when one thinks of fresh green peas. One can get tired of asparagus, as one can of strawberries—but tender peas I could eat forever. Then peaches, and melons; —and there are certain pears, too, that taste like heaven. One of my favourite daydreams for the long afternoon of life is to live alone, a formal, greedy, selfish old gentleman, in a square house, say in Devonshire, with a square garden, whose walls are covered with apricots and figs and peaches: and there are precious pears, too, of my own planting, on espaliers along the paths. I shall walk out with a gold-headed cane in the autumn sunshine, and just at the right moment I shall pick another pear. However, that isn't at all what I was going to say—'

CHAIRS

IN the streets of London there are door-bells I ring (I see myself ringing them); in certain houses there are chairs covered with chintz or cretonne in which I sit and talk about life, explaining often after tea what I think of it.

A GRIEVANCE

THEY are all persons of elegant manners and spotless reputations; they seem to welcome my visits, and they listen to my anecdotes with unflinching attention. I have only one grievance against them; they will keep in their houses mawkish books full of stale epithets, which, when I only seem to smell their proximity, produce in me a slight feeling of nausea.

There are people, I believe, who are affected in this way by the presence of cats.

I WENT in and shook hands with my hostess, but no one else took any special notice; no one screamed or left the room; the quiet murmur of talk went on. I suppose I seemed like the others; observed from outside no doubt I looked more or less like them.

But inside, seen from within . . . ? Or was it a conceivable hypothesis that we were all alike inside also—that all those quietly-talking people had got the Moon, too, in their heads?

'BUT when you are as old as I am! ' I said to the young lady in pink satin. ' But I don't know how old you are,' that young lady answered almost archly. We were getting on quite nicely.

' Oh I'm endlessly old; my memory goes back almost forever. I come out of the Middle Ages. I am the primitive savage we are all descended from; I believe in Devil-worship, and the power of the Stars; I dance under the new Moon, naked and tattooed and holy. I am a Cave-dweller, a contemporary of Mastodons and Mammoths; I am pleistocene and neolithic, and full of the lusts and terrors of the great pre-glacial forests. But that's nothing; I am millions of years older; I am an arboreal Ape, an aged Baboon, with all its instincts; I am a pre-simian quadruped, I have great claws, eyes that see in the dark, and a long prehensile tail.'

' Good gracious! ' said the terrified young lady in pink satin. Then she turned, and for the rest of the dinner talked in a hushed voice with her other neighbour.

IN THE BUS

AS I sat inside that crowded bus, so sad, so incredible and sordid seemed the fat face of the woman opposite me, that I interposed the thought of Kilimanjaro, that highest mountain of Africa, between us; the grassy slopes and green realms of negro kings from which its dark cone rises, the immense, dim, elephant-haunted forests which clothe its flanks; and above, the white crown of snow, freezing in eternal isolation over the palm trees and deserts of the African Equator.

JUSTIFICATION

WELL, what if I did put it on a little at that luncheon? Do I not owe it to my friends to assert now and then my claims to consideration; ought I always to allow myself to be trampled on and treated as dirt? And how about the Saints and Patriarchs of the Bible? Didn't Joseph tell of the dream in which his wheatsheaf was exalted; Deborah sing without blame how she arose a mother in Israel, and David boast of his triumph over the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear? Nay, in His confabulations with His chosen people, does not the Creator of the Universe Himself take every opportunity of impressing on those Hebrews His importance, His power, His glory?

Was I not made in His image?

THE SAYING OF A PERSIAN POET

ALL this hurry to dress and go out, these journeys in taxi-cabs, or in trains with my packed bag from big railway stations—what keeps me going, I sometimes ask myself; and I remember how, in his 'Masnavi I Ma'navi' or 'Spiritual Couplets,' Jalalu 'D-Din Muhammad Rumi says that our Desires, the swarm of gaudy Thoughts we pursue and follow, are short-lived like summer insects, and must all be killed before long by the winter of age.

MONOTONY

OH, to be becalmed on a sea of glass all day; to listen all day to rain on the roof, or wind in pine trees; to sit all day by a waterfall reading exquisite, artificial, monotonous Persian poems about an oasis-garden where it is always spring—where roses bloom and lovers sigh, and nightingales lament without ceasing, and white-robed figures sit in groups by the running water and discuss all day, and day after day, the Meaning of Life.

DAYDREAM

IN the cold and malicious society in which I live, I must never mention the Soul, nor speak of my aspirations. If I ever once let these people get a glimpse of the higher side of my nature, they would set on me like a pack of wolves and tear me in pieces.

I wish I had soulful friends—refined Maiden Ladies with ideals and long noses, who live at Hampstead or Putney, and play Chopin with passion. On sad autumn afternoons I would go and have tea with them, and talk of the spiritual meaning of Beethoven's late Sonatas; or discuss in the twilight the pathos of life and the Larger Hope.

BUT God sees me; He knows my beautiful nature, and how pure I keep amid all sorts of quite horrible temptations. And that is why, as I feel in my bones, there is a special Providence watching over me; an Angel sent expressly from heaven to guide my footsteps from harm. For I never trip up or fall downstairs like other people; I am not run over by cabs and busses at street-crossings; in the worst wind my hat never blows off.

And if ever any of the great cosmic processes or powers threaten me, I believe that God sees it: 'Stop it!' He shouts from His ineffable Throne, 'Don't you touch my Chosen One, my Pet Lamb, my Beloved. Leave him alone, I tell you!'

ACTION

I AM no mere thinker, no mere creature of dreams and imagination. I stamp and post letters; I buy new bootlaces and put them in my boots. And when I set out to get my hair cut, it is with the iron face of those men of empire and unconquerable will, those Cæsars and Napoleons, whose footsteps shake the earth.

WAITING

WE met at Waterloo; as we were paying the same visit, we travelled in the train together; but when we got out at that country station, she found that her boxes had not arrived. They might have gone on to the next station; I waited with her while enquiries were telephoned down the line. It was a mild spring evening: side by side we sat in silence on a wooden bench facing the platform; the bustle caused by the passing train ebbed away; the dusk deepened, and one by one the stars twinkled out in the serene sky.

'How peaceful it is!' I remarked at last. 'Is there not a certain charm,' I went on after another pause, 'in waiting like this in silence under the stars? It's after all a little adventure, is it not? a moment with a certain mood and colour and atmosphere of its own.'

'I often think,' I once more mused aloud, 'I often think that it is in moments like this of waiting and hushed suspense, that one tastes most fully the savour of life, the uncertainty, and yet the sweetness of our frail mortal condition, so capable of fear and hope, so dependent on a million accidents.'

'Luggage!' I said, after another silence, 'is it not after all absurd that minds which

contemplate the universe should cart about with them brushes and boots and drapery in leather boxes? Suppose all this paltry junk,' I said, giving my suitcase, which stood near me, a disdainful poke with my umbrella, 'suppose it all disappears, what after all does it matter?'

At last she spoke. 'But it's not your luggage,' she said, 'but mine which is lost.'

WE were talking of the Universe at tea, and one of our company declared that he at least was entirely without illusions. He had long since faced the fact that Nature had no sympathy with our hopes and fears, and was completely indifferent to our fate. The Universe, he said, was a great meaningless machine; Man, with his reason and moral judgments, was the product of blind forces, which, though they would so soon destroy him, he must yet despise. To endure this tragedy of our fate with passionless despair, never to wince or bow the head, to confront the hostile powers with high disdain, to fix with eyes of scorn the Gorgon face of Destiny, to stand on the brink of the abyss, hurling defiance at the icy stars—this, he said, was his attitude, and it produced, as you can imagine, a very powerful impression on the company. As for me, I was completely carried away by my enthusiasm.

'By Jove, that is a stunt!' I cried.

'SELF-DETERMINATION,' one of them insisted. 'Arbitration!' cried another.

'Co-operation?' suggested the mildest of the party.

'Confiscation!' answered an uncompromising female.

I, too, became slightly intoxicated by the sound of these vocables. And were they not the cure for all our ills?

'Inoculation!' I chimed in. 'Transubstantiation, Alliteration, Inundation, Flagellation and Afforestation!'

A FIGURE OF SPEECH

THOUGH I sometimes lay down the law myself on public questions, I don't very much care to hear other people do it. The heavy talker, however, who was now holding forth about finance, showed such a grasp of his subject, and made such mincemeat of a rash opponent, that I thought it best, for the moment, to say nothing.

'So what you allege,' he triumphed in his overbearing manner, 'is perfectly irrelevant. My withers are unwrung. It does not affect my position in the least.'

And then I lightly flung my Goliath pebble. 'Withers?' I ingenuously asked, 'what are the withers, anyhow?'

He turned on me a glance of anger and contempt. 'Withers—why the withers—' 'It's only—only a figure of speech,' he stammered.

'Oh!' I said, with a look at the company full of suggestion, 'a figure of speech—I see.'

'BUT I'm told you don't believe in love—' 'Now who on earth could have told you that?' I cried indignantly. 'Of course I believe in it—there is no one more enthusiastic about Love than I am. I believe in it at all times and seasons, but especially in the Spring. Why, just think of it! True-love amid the apple-blossoms, lovers who outwake the nightingales of April, the touch of hands and lips, and the clinging of flower-soft limbs together; and all this amid the gay, musical, perfumed landscape of the Spring. Why, nothing, Miss Tomkins, could be more appropriate and pretty!'

'Haven't I said so again and again, haven't I published it more than once in the weekly papers?'

'IT'S awful,' I said, 'I think it simply wicked, the way you tear your friends to pieces!'

'But you do it yourself, you know you do! You analyse and analyse people, and then you make them up again into creatures larger than life—'

'That's exactly it,' I answered gravely. 'If I take people to pieces, I do it in order to put them together again better than they were before; I make them more real, so to speak, more significant, more essentially themselves. But to cut them up, as you do, and leave the fragments lying around anywhere on the floor —I can't tell you how cruel and heartless and wrong I think it!'

AGAIN, as the train drew out of the station, the old gentleman pulled out of his pocket his great shining watch; and for the fifth, or, as it seemed to me, the five-hundredth time, he said (we were in the carriage alone together) 'To the minute, to the very minute! It's a marvellous thing, the Railway; a wonderful age!'

Now I had been long annoyed by the old gentleman's smiling face, platitudes, and piles of newspapers; I had no love for the Age, and an impulse came on me to denounce it.

'Allow me to tell you,' I said, 'that I consider it a wretched, an ignoble age. Where's the greatness of life? Where's dignity, leisure, stateliness; where's Art and Eloquence? Where are your great scholars, statesmen? Let me ask you, sir,' I cried glaring at him, 'where's your Gibbon, your Burke or Chatham?'

COMFORT

PEOPLE often said that there was nothing sadder, she mourned, than the remembrance of past happiness; but to her it seemed that not the way we remembered, but the way we forgot, was the real tragedy of life. Everything faded from us; our joys and sorrows vanished alike in the irrevocable flux; we could not stay their fleeting. Did I not feel, she asked, the sadness of this forgetting, this outliving all the things we care for, this constant dying, so to speak, in the midst of life?

I felt its sadness very much; I felt quite lugubrious about it. 'And yet,' I said (for I did really want to think of something that might console this lamentable lady), 'and yet can we not find, in this fading of recollection, some recompense, after all? Think, for instance—' But what, alas, could I suggest?

'Think,' I began once more after a moment of reflection, 'think of forgetting, and reading over and over again, all Jane Austen's novels!'

IT is pleasant to saunter out in the morning sun and idle along the summer streets with no purpose.

But is it Right?

I am not really bothered by these Questions —the hoary old puzzles of Ethics and Philosophy, which lurk around the London corners to waylay me. I have got used to them; and the most formidable of all, the biggest bug of Metaphysics, the Problem which nonplusses the wisest heads on this Planet, has become quite a familiar companion of mine. What is Reality? I ask myself almost daily: how does the External World exist, materialised in mid-air, apart from my perceptions? This show of streets and skies, of policemen and perambulators and hard pavements, is it a mere vision, a figment of the Mind; or does it remain there, permanent and imposing, when I stop thinking about it?

Often, as I saunter along Piccadilly or Bond Street, I please myself with the Berkeleian notion that Matter has no existence; that this so solid-seeming World is all idea, all appearance—that I am carried soft through space inside an immense Thought-bubble, a floating, diaphanous, opal-tinted Dream.

LONELINESS

IS there, then, no friend? No one who hates Ibsen nd problem plays, and the Supernatural, and Switzerland and Adultery as much as I do? Must I live all my life as mute as a mackerel, companionless and uninvited, and never tell anyone what I think of my famous contemporaries? Must I plough always a solitary furrow, and tread the winepress alone?

THE WELSH HARP

WHAT charming corners one can find in the immense dinginess of London, and what curious encounters become a part of the London-lover's experience! The other day, when I walked a long way out of the Edgware Road, and stopped for tea at the Welsh Harp, on the banks of the Brent Reservoir, I found, beyond the modern frontage of this inn, an old garden adorned with sham ruins and statues, and full of autumn flowers and the shimmer of clear water. Sitting there and drinking my tea —alone as I thought at first, in the twilight— I became aware that the garden had another occupant; that at another table, not far from me, a vague and not very prosperous-looking woman in a shabby bonnet was sitting, with her reticule lying by her, also drinking tea and gazing at the after-glow of the sunset. An elderly spinster I thought her, a dressmaker perhaps, or a retired governess, one of those maiden ladies who live alone in quiet lodgings, and are fond of romantic fiction and solitary excursions.

As we sat there, we two alone in the growing dusk, more than once our glances met, and a curious relation of sympathy and understanding seemed to establish itself between us;

we seemed to carry on a dialogue full of tacit avowals. 'Yes,' we seemed to say, as our eyes met over our suspended tea-cups, 'yes, Beauty, Romance, the Blue Bird that sings of Happiness—these are the things we care for—the only things that, in spite of everything, we still care for; but where can we find them in the dingy London streets and suburbs?'

'And yet,' our eyes seemed to ask each other, 'isn't this garden, in its shabby, pretentious way, romantic; isn't it like something in a poem of Verlaine's; hasn't it now, in the dim light, a kind of beauty? And this mood of meditation after our excellent tea, what name, if we are honest, can we call it by, if we do not call it Happiness?'

MISAPPREHENSION

PEOPLE often seem to take me for some one else; they talk to me as if I were a person of earnest views and unalterable convictions. 'What is your opinion of Democracy?' they ask: 'Are you in favour of the Channel Tunnel?' 'Do you believe in existence after Death?'

I assume a thoughtful attitude, and by means of grave looks and evasive answers, I conceal—or at least I hope I conceal—my discreditable secret.

WHAT on earth had I come up for? I stood out of breath in my bedroom, having completely forgotten the errand which had carried me upstairs, leaping two steps at a time.

Gloves! Of course it was my gloves which I had left there. But what did gloves matter, I asked myself, in a world, as Dr. Johnson describes it, bursting with misery?

O stars and garters! how bored I am by this trite, moralising way of regarding natural phenomena—this crying of vanity on the beautiful manifestations of mechanical forces. This desire of mine to appear out of doors in appropriate apparel, if it can thus defy and overcome the law of gravitation, if it can lift twelve stone of matter thirty or forty feet above the earth's surface; if it can do this every day, and several times a day, and never get out of order, is it not as remarkable and convenient in the house as a hydraulic lift ?

SLOANE STREET

WHEN I walk out, middle-aged, but still sprightly, and still, if the truth must be told, with an idiot dream in my heart of some romantic encounter, I look at the passers-by, say in Sloane Street, and then I begin to imagine moonfaces more alluring than any I see in that thoroughfare. But then again vaster thoughts visit me, remote metaphysical musings; those faces like moons I imagined all wane as moons wane, the passers-by vanish; and immortal Reason, disdaining the daymoth she dwells with, turns away to her crystalline sphere of sublime contemplation. I am lost out of time, I walk on alone in a world of white silence.

REGENT'S PARK

I WONDERED, as I passed Regent's Park on my way to Hampstead, what kind of people live in those great stuccoed terraces and crescents, with their solemn façades and friezes and pediments and statues. People larger than life I picture the inhabitants of those inexpensive, august, unfashionable houses, people with a dignity of port, an amplitude of back, an emphasis of vocabulary and conviction unknown in other regions; Dowagers and Dignitaries who have retired from a world no longer worthy of them, ex-Governors of Dominions, unavailing Viceroys, superannuated Bishops and valetudinarian Generals, who wear top-hats and drive around the Park in old-fashioned barouches—a society, I imagine it, not frivolous, not flippant, entirely devoid of double meanings; a society in which the memory of Queen Victoria is still revered, and regrets are still felt, perhaps, for the death of the Prince Consort.

Or, as I have sometimes fancied, are those noble mansions the homes of the Victorian Statesmen and Royal Ladies and distinguished-looking Murderers who, in the near-by wax-work exhibition, gaze on the shallow, modern generation which chatters and pushes all day before the glassy disapprobation of their eyes?

THE AVIARY

PEACOCK Vanities, great, crested Cockatoos of Glory, gay Infatuations and painted Daydreams—what a pity it is all the Blue Birds of impossible Paradises have such beaks and sharp claws, that one really has to keep them shut up in their not too cleanly cages!

AS I walked on the air soon lightened; the Throne, the Altar and the top-hat cast fainter shadows, the figures of John Bright and Gladstone and Queen Victoria faded from my mind. I had entered the precincts of St. John's Wood; and as I went past its villas of coquettish aspect, with their gay Swiss gables, their frivolously Gothic or Italian or almost Oriental faces, the lighter aspects of existence they represent, the air they have of not taking life too seriously, began to exert their influence.

St. John's Wood is the home in fiction of adventuresses and profligacy and Bohemian supper-parties; often have I read about those foreign Countesses, of unknown history and incredible fascination, who decoy handsome young officials of the Foreign Office to these villas, and rob them, in dim-lit, scented bedrooms, of important documents. But I at least have never too harshly blamed these young diplomatists. Silent is the street as the mysterious brougham pauses, lovely the eyes that flash, and graceful the white-gloved hand that beckons from the carriage window; and how can they resist (for they are only human) the lure of so adventurous, so enchanting an invitation?

THE GARDEN SUBURB

I HAD often heard of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, and the attempt of its inhabitants to create an atmosphere of the Higher Culture, to concentrate, as it were, the essence of the ideal life in one region. But I must now confess that it was in a spirit of profane curiosity that I walked up towards its courts and closes. And when I saw the notices of the Societies for Ethical Culture and Handicrafts and Child Study, the lectures on Reincarnation, the Holy Grail, the Signs of the Zodiac, and the Teaching of the Holy Zoroaster, I am afraid I laughed. But how shallow, how thin this laughter soon sounded amid the quiet amenity, the beautiful distinction of this pretty paradise! It was an afternoon of daydreams; the autumnal light under the low clouds was propitious to inner recollection; and as I walked the streets of this ideal city, soothed by the sense of order and beautiful architecture all around me, I began to feel that I too was an Idealist, that here was my spiritual home, and that it would be a right and seemly thing to give up the cinemas and come and make my dwelling on this hill-top. Pictures floated before my eyes of tranquil days, days of gardening and

handicrafts and lectures, evenings spent in perusing the world's masterpieces.

Although I still frequent the cinemas, and spend too much time gazing in at the windows of expensive shops, and the reverie of that afternoon has come to no fruition, yet I feel myself a better person for it: I feel that it marks me off from the merely cynical and worldly. For I at least have had a Pisgah sight of the Promised City; I have made its ideal my own, if but for an afternoon, and only in a daydream.

'WELL, I must say!' Reason exclaimed, when we found ourselves in the street again.

'What's the matter now?' I asked uneasily.

'Why are you always trying to be some one else? Why not be what you really are?'

'But what am I really? Again I ask you?'

'I do hate to see you playing the ass; and think how they must laugh at you!'

The glossy and respected image of myself I had left in the house behind us began to tarnish.

'And what next?' my querulous companion went on. 'What will you be in South Kensington, I wonder? a sad and solitary Satan, disillusioned and distinguished, or a bluff, breezy sailor, fond of his bottle and his boon companions?'

AN ANOMALY

WHEN people embellish their conversation with a glitter of titles, and drag into it self-aggrandizing anecdotes, though I laugh at this peacock vein in them, I do not harshly condemn it. Nay, since I too am human, since I too belong to the great household, would it be surprising if—say once or twice in my life—I also should have gratified this tickling relish of the tongue?

No—but what is surprising, is the way that, as I feel, I alone always escape detection, always throw dust in other people's eyes.

THE topic was one of my favourite topics of conversation, but I didn't at all feel on this occasion that it was I who was speaking. No, it was the Truth shining through me; the light of the Revelation which I had been chosen to proclaim and blazon to the world. No wonder they were all impressed by my moving tones and gestures; no wonder even the fastidious lady whom it was most difficult to please kept watching me with almost ecstatic attention.

As a cloud may obscure the sun in his glory, so from some morass of memory arose a tiny mist of words to darken my mind for a moment. I brushed them aside; they had no meaning. Sunning myself in the mirror of those eyes, never, for a moment, could I credit that devil-suggested explanation of their gaze.

Oh, no! that phrase I had heard, I had heard, was a nonsense phrase; the words, 'She mimics you to perfection,' were nothing but a bit of unintelligible jabber.

'I DO so hate gossip,' she murmured.

'How I hate it too!' I heard myself exclaim.

'There is so much that is good and noble in human nature; why not talk of that?'

'Why not indeed?' I sighed.

'I always feel that it is one's own fault if one dislikes people, or finds them boring.'

'How I agree with you!' I cried sincerely.

'But people are nowadays so cynical—they sneer at everything that makes life worth living—Love, Faith, Friendship—'

'And yet those very names are so lovely that even when used in mockery they shed a radiance—they shine like stars.'

'How beautifully you put it! I have so enjoyed our talk.' I had enjoyed it too, and felt all the better for it, only a little giddy and out of breath, as if I had been up in a balloon.

THE BUBBLE

WALKING home at night, troubled by the world's affairs, and with the National Debt crushing down my weak shoulders, I sometimes allow my Thoughts an interlude of solace. From the jar in which I keep my vanity bottled, I remove the cork; out rushes that friendly Jinn and swells up and fills the sky. I walk on lightly through another world, a world in which I cut a very different figure.

I shall not describe that exquisite, evanescent universe; even for me 'tis but the bubble of a moment; I soon snuff it out, or of itself it melts in the thin air.

CAUTION

WITH all that I know about life, all this cynical and sad knowledge of what happens and must happen, all the experience and caution and disillusion stored and packed in the uncanny, cold, grey matter of my cerebrum—with all this inside my head, how can I ever dream of banging it against the Stars ?

DESIRES

THESE exquisite and absurd fancies of mine—little curiosities, and greedinesses, and impulses to kiss and touch and snatch, and all the vanities and artless desires that nest and sing in my heart like birds in a bush—all these, we are now told, are an inheritance from our pre-human past, and were hatched long ago in very ancient swamps and forests. But what of that? I like to share in the dumb delights of birds and animals, to feel my life drawing its sap from roots deep in the soil of Nature. I am proud of those bright-eyed, furry, four-footed progenitors, and not at all ashamed of my cousins, the Tigers and Apes and Peacocks.

'AWFUL moments? Why, yes, of course,' I said, 'life is full of them—let me think—'

'To find other people's unposted letters in an old pocket; to be seen looking at oneself in a street-mirror, or overhead talking of the Ideal to a duchess; to refuse Nuns who come to the door to ask for subscriptions, or to be lent by a beautiful new acquaintance a book she has written full of mystical slipslop, or dreadful musings in an old-world garden—'

'BUT perhaps he is a friend of yours?' said my lips. 'Is it safe?' my eyes asked, 'Dare I tell you what I think of him?'

It was safe; only silence fell upon them, those Sad Ones, who at my decease should murmur, 'He never said of any one an unkind word.' 'Alas, Farewell!' breathed that boyish daydream of my funeral, as it faded.

'LIFE,' said a gaunt widow, with a reputation for being clever—'life is a perpetual toothache.'

In this vein the conversation went on: the familiar topics were discussed of labour troubles, epidemics, cancer, tuberculosis, and taxation.

Near me there sat a little old lady who was placidly drinking her tea, and taking no part in the melancholy chorus. 'Well, I must say,' she remarked, turning to me and speaking in an undertone, 'I must say I enjoy life.'

'So do I,' I whispered.

'When I enjoy things,' she went on, 'I know it. Eating, for instance, the sunshine, my hot-water bottle at night. Other people are always thinking of unpleasant things. It makes a difference,' she added, as she got up to go with the others.

'All the difference in the world,' I answered.

It's too bad that I had no chance for a longer conversation with this wise old lady. I felt that we were congenial spirits, and had a lot to tell each other. For she and I are not among those who fill the mind with garbage; we make a better use of that divine and adorable endowment. We invite Thought to share, and by

sharing to enhance, the pleasures of the delicate senses; we distil, as it were, an elixir from our golden moments, keeping out of the shining crucible of consciousness everything that tastes sour. I do wish that we could have discussed at greater length, like two Alchemists, the theory and practice of our art.

THEY were talking of people I did not know. 'How do they spend their time there?' some one asked.

Then I, who had been sitting too long silent, raised my voice. 'Ah, that's a mysterious question, when you think of it, how people spend their time. We only see them after all in glimpses; but what, I often wonder, do they do in their hushed and shrouded hours—in all the interstices of their lives?'

'In the what?'

'In the times, I mean, when no one sees them. In the intervals.'

'But that isn't the word you used?'

'It's the same thing—the interstices—'

Of course there was a deaf lady present. 'What did you say?' she inquired, holding out her ear-trumpet for my answer.

GUILT

WHAT should I think of? I asked myself as I opened my umbrella. How should I amuse my imagination, that harsh, dusky, sloshy, winter afternoon, as I walked to Bedford Square? Should I think of Arabia or exotic birds; of Albatrosses, or of those great Condors who sleep on their outspread wings in the blue air above the Andes?

But a sense of guilt oppressed me. What had I done or left undone? And the shadowy figures that seemed to menace and pursue me? Yes, I had wronged them; it was again those Polish Poets, it was Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Szymonowicz, Krasicki, Kochanowski, of all whose works I had never read a word.

OUT of the fog a dim figure accosted me. 'I beg your pardon, Sir, but could you tell me how to get to Cadogan Gardens?'

'Cadogan Gardens? I am afraid I am lost myself. Perhaps, Sir,' I added (we two seemed oddly alone and intimate in that white world of mystery together), 'perhaps, Sir, you can tell me where I can find the Gardens I am looking for?' I breathed their name.

'Hesperian Gardens?' the voice repeated. 'I don't think I have ever heard of Hesperian Gardens.'

'Oh, surely!' I cried, 'The Gardens of the Sunset and the singing Maidens!'

'But what I am really looking for,' I confided to that dim-seen figure, 'what I am always hoping to find is the Fortunate Abodes, the Happy Orchard, the Paradise our parents lost so long ago.'

AS I sat there, hopeless, with my coat and hat on in my bedroom, I felt I had no hold on life, no longer the slightest interest in it. To gain all that the world could give I would not have raised a listless finger; and it was entirely without intention that I took a cigarette, and felt for matches in my pocket. It was the act of an automaton, of a corpse that twitches a little after life has left it.

But when I found that I hadn't any matches, that—hang it!—there wasn't a box of matches anywhere, then, with this vexation, life came flooding back—the warm, familiar sense of my own existence, with all its exasperation, and incommunicable charm.

"SPEAKING of Charm,' I said, 'there is one quality which I find very attractive, though most people don't notice it, and rather dislike it if they do. That quality is Observation. You read of it in eighteenth-century books—"a Man of much Observation," they say. So few people,' I went on, 'really notice anything—they live in theories and thin dreams, and look at you with unseeing eyes. They take very little interest in the real world; but the Observers I speak of find it a source of inexhaustible fascination. Nothing escapes them; they can tell at once what the people they meet are like, where they belong, their profession, the kind of houses they live in. The slightest thing is enough for them to judge by—a tone of voice, a gesture, a way of putting on the hat—'

'I always judge people,' one of the company remarked, 'by their boots. It's people's feet I look at first. And bootlaces now—what an awful lot bootlaces can tell you!'

As I slipped my feet back under my chair, I subjected my theory of Charm to a rapid revision.

CARAVANS

ALWAYS over the horizon of the Sahara move those soundless caravans of camels, swaying with their padded feet across the desert I imagine, till in the shadowy distance of my mind they fade away, and vanish.

WHAT are the beliefs about God in Grosvenor Gardens, the surmises of South Kensington concerning our fate beyond the Grave? On what grounds does life seem worth living in Pimlico; and how far in the Cromwell Road do they follow, or think they follow, the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount?

If I can but dimly discern the ideals of these familiar regions, how much more am I in the dark about the inner life of the great outer suburbs. In what works of local introspection can I study the daydreams of Brixton, the curiosities and discouragements of Camberwell or Ealing?

More than once I have paused before a suburban villa, telling myself that I had after all but to ring the bell, and go in and ask them. But alas, they would not tell me; they could not tell me, even if they would.

'WHAT a beautiful movement!' she murmured, as the music paused.

'Beautiful!' I roused myself to echo, though I hadn't heard a note.

Immediately I found myself again in the dock; and again the trial began, that ever-recurring criminal Action in which I am both Judge and culprit, all the jury, and the advocate on either side.

I now pleaded my other respectable attainments and previous good character; and winning a favourable verdict, I dropped back into my dream, letting the violin wail unheard through the other movements, and the Grand Piano tinkle.

SOMEWHERE

SOMEWHERE, far below the horizon, there is a City; some day I shall sail to find that sun-bright harbour; by what star I shall steer my vessel, or where that seaport lies, I know not; but somehow, through calms and storms and all the vague sea-noises I shall voyage, until at last some mountain peak will rise to tell me I am near my destination; or I shall see, some day at dusk, a lighthouse twinkling at its port.

THE PLATITUDE

'IT'S after all the little things in life that really matter!' I exclaimed. I was as much chagrined as they were flabbergasted by this involuntary outbreak; but I have become an expert in that Taoist art of disintegration which Yen Hui described to Confucius as the art of 'sitting and forgetting.' I have learnt to lay aside my personality in awkward moments, to dissolve this self of mine into the All Pervading; to fall back, in fact, into the universal flux, and sit, as I now sat there, a blameless lump of matter, rolled on according to the heavens' rolling, with rocks and stones and trees.

THE FETISH

ENSHRINED in a box of white pasteboard upstairs I keep a black, ceremonial object; 'tis my link with Christendom and the world of grave custom; only on sacred occasions does it make its appearance, only at some great tribal dance of my race. To pageants of Woe I convey it, or of the hugest Felicity: at great Hallelujahs of Wedlock, or at last Valedictions, I hold it bare-headed as I bow before altars and tombs.

THE ECHO

NOW and then, from the other end of the table, words and phrases reached us as we talked.

'What do they mean by complexes?' she asked. 'Oh, it's only one of the catchwords of the day,' I answered. 'Everything's a complex just now.'

'The talk of most people,' I went on, 'is simply—how shall I put it?—simply the ticking of clocks; it marks the hour, but it has no other interest. But I like to think for myself, to be something more than a mere mouthpiece of the age I live in—a mere sounding-board and echo of contemporary chatter.'

'Just listen!' I said as again their raised voices reached our ears.

'It's simply one of the catchwords of the day,' some one was shouting, 'the merest echo of contemporary chatter!'

'MY parlour-maid and cook both gave notice—'

'My stomach is not at all what it should be—'

'Of course the telephone was out of order—'

'The coal they sent was all stones and coal-dust—'

'All the electric wiring has had to be renewed—'

'I find it impossible to digest potatoes—'

'My aunt has had to have eighteen of her teeth extracted—'

Am I nothing but a dust-bin or kitchen-sink for other people's troubles? Have I no agonies, no indigestions of my own?

THE HOT-BED

IT was too much: the news in the paper was appalling; Central Europe and the Continent of Asia in a state of chaos; no comfort anywhere; tempests in the Channel, earthquakes, famines, strikes, insurrections. The burden of the mystery, the weight of all this incorrigible world was really more than I could cope with.

'To prepare a hot-bed for early vegetables, equal quantities are taken of horse-manure and fallen leaves; a large heap is built in alternate layers,' I read with passionate interest, 'of these materials; it is left for several days, and then turned over. The site of the hot-bed should be sheltered from cold winds, but open to the sunshine. Early and dwarf varieties of potatoes should be chosen; asparagus plants may be dug up from the open garden—'

'BUT you haven't spoken a word—you ought to tell us what you think.'

'The truth is,' I whispered hoarsely in her unaverted ear, 'the truth is, I talk too much. Think of all the years I have been wagging my tongue; think how I shall go on wagging it, till it is smothered in dust!'

'And the worst of it is,' I went on hoarsely vociferating, 'the horror is that no one understands me; I can never make clear to any one my view of the world. I may wear my tongue to the stump, and no one will ever know—I shall go down to the grave, and no one will know what I mean.'

MAGIC

'DO you think there are ghosts?' she foamed, her eyes ablaze, 'do you believe in Magic?' I had no intention of discussing the supernatural with this spook-enthusiast.

'Magic,' I mused aloud, 'what a beautiful word Magic is when you think of it.'

'Are you interested in etymology?' I asked. 'To my mind there is nothing more fascinating than the derivation of words—it's full of the romance and wonder of real life and history. Think of *Magic,* for instance; it comes, as no doubt you know, from the Magi, or ancient priests of Persia.'

'Don't you love our deposit of Persian words in English? To me they glitter like jewels in our northern speech. *Magic* and *Paradise,* for instance; and the names of flowers and gems and rich fruits and tissues—*Tulip* and *Lilac* and *Jasmin* and *Peach* and *Lapis Lazuli,*' I chanted, waving my hands to keep off the spooks, 'and *Orange* and *Azure* and *Scarlet.*'

MRS. BACKE would be down in a few minutes, so I waited in the drawing-room of this new acquaintance who had so kindly invited me to call.

It is indiscreet, but I cannot help it; if I am left alone in a room, I cannot help peering about at the pictures and ornaments and books. Interiors, the habitations people make for their souls, are so fascinating, and tell so much; they interest me like sea-shells, or the nests of birds.

'A lover of Switzerland,' I inferred, 'has travelled in the East—the complete works of Canon Farrar—that big bust with whiskers is Mendelssohn, no doubt. Good heavens! a stuffed cat! And that Moorish plaque is rather awful. Still, some of the nicest people have no taste—'

Then I saw the clock. One look at that pink china clock, with the face of a monkey, was enough. Softly from that drawing-room, softly I stole downstairs, and closed the front door of that house softly behind me.

WHISKERS

THERE was once a young man who thought he saw Life as it really is, who prided himself on looking at it grimly in the face without illusions. And he went on looking at it grimly, as he thought, for a number of years. This was his notion of himself; but one day, meeting some very young people, he saw, reflected as it were in their eyes, a bland old gentleman with a white waistcoat and Victorian whiskers, a lover of souls and sunsets, and noble solutions for all problems—

That was what he saw in the eyes of those atrocious young men.

THE SPELLING LESSON.

THE anecdote which had caused the laughter of those young people was not a thing to joke about. I expressed my conviction briefly; but the time-honoured word I made use of seemed unfamiliar to them—they looked at each other and began whispering together. Then one of them asked in a hushed voice, 'It's what, did you say?'

I repeated my monosyllable loudly.

Again they whispered together, and again their spokesman came forward.

'Do you mind telling us how you spell it?'

'I spell it with a W!' I shouted.

'W-r-o-n-g—Wrong!'

JEUNESSE

MIND you, I don't say that their eyes aren't bigger than ours, their eyelashes longer, their faces more pink and plump—and they can skip about with an agility of limb which we cannot equal. But all the same a great deal too much is made of these painted dolls.

Think of the thinness of their conversation!

Depicted in gaudy tints on the covers of paper novels they look well enough; and they make a better appearance in punts, I admit, than we do. But is that a reason why they should be allowed to disturb the decorum of tables, and interrupt with their giggles and squeaks our grave consultations?

HANGING ON

IF it didn't all depend on me; if there was any one else to decide the destinies of Europe; if I wasn't bound to vindicate the Truth on all occasions, and shout down every falsehood, standing alone in arms against a sea of error, and holding desperately in place the hook from which Truth and Righteousness and Good Taste hang as by a thread and tremble over the unspeakable abyss; if but for a day or two; —it cannot be, I cannot let Art and Civilisation go crashing into chaos. Suppose the skies should fall in while I was napping; suppose the round world should take its chance to collapse into stardust again?

SUPERANNUATION

'WHAT an intolerable young person!' I exclaimed, the moment he had left the room. 'How can one sit and listen to such folly? The arrogance and ignorance of these young men! And the things they write, and their pictures!'

'It's all pose and self-advertisement, I tell you—'

'They have no reverence!' I gobbled.

Now why do I do it? I know it turns the hair grey and stiffens the joints—why, then, by denouncing them in this unhygienic fashion, do I talk myself into an invalid and old fogey before my time?

'IT'S the result of Board School Education—'

'It's the popular Press—'

'It's the selfishness of the Working Classes—'

'It's the Cinema—'

'It's the Jews—'

'Paid Agitators!—'

'The decay of faith—'

'The disintegration of family life—'

'I put it down,' I said, 'to sun-spots. If you want to know what I think,' I went inexorably on, 'if you ask me the cause of all this modern unrest—'

DELAY

I WAS late for breakfast this morning, for I was delayed in my heavenly hot bath by the thought of all the other Earnest Thinkers, who, at that very moment—I had good reason to believe it—were blissfully soaking the time away in hot baths all over London.

SMILES

WHEN people smile to themselves in the street, when I see the face of an ugly man or uninteresting woman light up (faces, it would seem, not exactly made for happy smiling), I wonder from what visions within those smiles are reflected; from what footlights, what gay and incredible scenes they gleam of glory and triumph.

THE DAWN

MY Imagination has its dancing-places, like the Dawn in Homer; there are terraces, with balustrades and marble fountains, where Ideal Beings smile at my approach; there are ilex-groves and beech trees in whose shadows I hold forth for ever; gardens fairer than all earthly gardens where groups of ladies grow never weary of listening to my voice.

'BUT every one is enthusiastic about the book!' I protested. 'Well, what if they are?' was the answer.

I too am a Superior Person, but the predicament was awkward. To appear the dupe of a vulgar admiration, to be caught crying stale fish at a choice luncheon party!

'Oh, of course!' I hit back, 'I know it's considered the thing just now to despise the age one lives in. No one, even in Balham, will admit that they have read the books of the day. But my attitude has always been' (what had it been? I had to think in a hurry), 'I have always felt that it was more interesting, after all, to belong to one's own epoch; to share its dated and unique vision, that flying glimpse of the great panorama, which no subsequent generation can ever recapture. To be Elizabethan in the age of Elizabeth; romantic at the height of the Romantic Movement—'

But it was no good: I saw it was no good, so I took a large pear and eat it in silence. I know a good deal about pears, and am particularly fond of them. This one was a *Doyenne du Comice,* the most delicious kind of all.

INSOMNIA

SOMETIMES, when I am cross and cannot sleep, I begin an angry contest with the opinions I object to. Into the room they flop, those bat-like monsters of Wrong-Belief and Darkness; and though they glare at me with the daylight faces of bullying opponents, and their voices are the voices that often shout me down in argument, yet, in these nocturnal controversies, it is always my assertions that admit no answer.

I do not spare them; it is now their turn to be lashed to fury, and made to eat their words.

'THE abstractedness of the relation, on the other hand, brings to consciousness no less strongly the foreignness of the Idea to natural phenomena. In its widest formulation—' Mechanically I turned the page; but what on earth was it all about? Some irrelevant fancy must have been fluttering between my spectacles and the printed paper.

I turned and caught that pretty Daydream. To be a Wit—yes, while my eyes were reading Hegel, I had stolen out myself to amaze society with my epigrams. Each conversation I had crowned at its most breathless moment with words of double meaning which had echoed all through London. Feared and famous all my life-time for my repartees, when at last had come the last sad day, when my ashes had been swept at last into an urn of moderate dimensions, still then had I lived upon the lips of men; still had my plays on words been echoed, my sayings handed down in memoirs to ensuing ages.

MORAL TRIUMPH

WHEN I see motors gliding up at night to great houses in the fashionable squares, I journey in them: I ascend in imagination the grand stairways of those palaces; and ushered with éclat into drawing-rooms of splendour, I sun myself in the painted smiles of the Mayfair Jezebels, and glitter in that world of wigs and rouge and diamonds like a star. There I quaff the elixir and sweet essence of mundane triumph, eating truffles to the sound of trumpets, and feasting at sunrise on lobster-salad and champagne.

But it's all dust, it's all emptiness and ashes; and I retire to an imagined desert to contend with Demons; to overcome in holy combats unspeakable temptations, and purge, by prodigious abstinences, my heart of base desire. For this is the only imperishable victory, this is the true immortal garland; this triumph over the predilections of our fallen nature crowns us with a satisfaction which the vain glory of the world can never give.

A VOW

LIKE the Aztec Emperors of ancient Mexico, who took a solemn oath to make the Sun pursue his wonted journey, I too have vowed to corroborate and help sustain the Solar System; vowed that by no vexed thoughts of mine, no attenuating doubts, nor incredulity, nor malicious scepticism, nor hypercritical analysis, shall the great frame and first principles of things be compromised or shaken.

THE SPRINGS OF ACTION

'WHAT am I? What is man?'

I had looked into a number of books for an answer to this question, before I came on Jeremy Bentham's simple and satisfactory explanation: Man is a mechanism, moved by just so many springs of Action. These springs he enumerates in elaborate tables; and glancing over them this morning before getting up, I began with *Charity, All-embracing Benevolence, Love of Knowledge, Laudable Ambition, Godly Zeal.* Then I waited, but there was no sign or buzz of any wheel beginning to move in my inner mechanism. I looked again: I saw *Arrogance, Ostentation, Vainglory, Abomination, Rage, Fury, Revenge,* and I was about to leap from my bed in a paroxysm of passions, when fortunately my eye fell on another set of motives, *Love of Ease, Indolence, Procrastination, Sloth.*

'WHAT I say is, what I say!' I vociferate, as a Parrot in the great cage of the World, I hop, screeching, 'What I say is!' from perch to perch.

SHRINKAGE

SOMETIMES my soul floats out beyond the constellations; then all the vast life of the Universe is mine. Then again it evaporates, it shrinks, it dwindles; and of all that flood which over-brimmed the bowl of the great Cosmos, there is hardly enough now left to fill a teaspoon.

'YOU smoke too much!' whispers the still small voice of Conscience.

'You are a failure, nobody likes you,' Self-contempt keeps muttering.

'What's the good of it all?' sighs Disillusion, arid as a breath from the Sahara.

I can't tell you how all these Voices bore me; but I can listen all day with grave attention to that suave bosom-Jesuit who keeps on unweariedly proving that everything I do is done for the public good, and all my acts and appetites and inclinations in the most amazing harmony with Pure Reason and the dictates of the Moral Law.

EVANESCENCE

HOW the years pass and life changes, how all things float down the stream of Time and vanish; how friendships fade, and illusions crumble, and hopes dissolve, and solid piece after piece of soap melts away in our hands as we wash them!

COMPLACENCY

DOVE-GREY and harmless as a dove, full of piety and innocence and pure thoughts, my Soul brooded unaffectedly within me—I was only half listening to that shrill conversation. And I began to wonder, as more than once in little moments like this of self-esteem I have wondered, whether I might not claim to be something more, after all, than a mere echo or compilation—might not claim in fact to possess a distinct personality of my own. Might it not be worth while, I now asked myself, to follow up this pleasing conjecture, to retire like Descartes from the world, and spend the rest of life, as he spent it, trying to prove my own existence?

MY PORTRAIT

FOR after all I am no amœba, no mere sack and stomach; I am capable of discourse, can ride a bicycle, look up trains in Bradshaw; in fact, I am and calmly boast myself a Human Being—that Masterpiece of Nature, a rational, polite, meat-eating Man.

What stellar collisions and conflagrations, what floods and slaughters and enormous efforts has it not cost the Universe to make me—of what astral periods and cosmic processes am I not the crown and wonder?

Where, then, is the Esplanade or Alp or earth-dominating Terrace for my sublime Statue; the landscape of palaces and triumphal arches for the background of my Portrait; stairs of marble, flung against the sunset, not too narrow and ignoble for me to pause with ample gesture on their balustraded flights?

THE RATIONALIST

OCCULTISMS, incantations, glimpses of the Beyond, intimations from another world—all kinds of supernaturalisms are distasteful to me; I cling to the known world of common sense and explicable phenomena; and I was much put out to find, this morning, a cabbalistic inscription written in letters of large menace on my bath-room floor. TAM HTAB —what could be the meaning of these cryptic words, and how on earth had they got there? Like Belshazzar, my eyes were troubled by this writing, and my knees smote one against the other; till majestic Reason, deigning to look downward from her contemplation of eternal causes, spelt backwards for me, with a pitying smile, the homely, harmless inscription on the BATH MAT, which was lying there wrong side up.

THOUGHTS

ONE Autumn, a number of years ago—I forget the exact date, but it was a considerable time before the War—I spent a few weeks in Venice in lodgings that looked out on an old Venetian garden. At the end of the garden there was a rustic temple, and on its pediment stood some naked, decayed, gesticulating statues—heathen gods and goddesses I vaguely thought them—and above, among the yellowing trees, I could see the belfry of a small convent—a convent of Nuns vowed to contemplation, who were immured there for life, and never went outside the convent walls.

The belfry was so near that when, towards dusk, the convent bell began to ring against the sky, I could see its bell-rope and clapper moving; and sometimes, as I sat there at my window, I would think about the mysterious existence, so near me, of those life-renouncing virgins.

Very clearly it comes back to me, the look of that untidy garden, of those gesticulating statues, and of that convent bell swinging against the sky; but the thoughts that I thought about those Nuns I have completely forgotten. They were probably not of any especial interest.

PHRASES

IS there, after all, any solace like the solace and consolation of Language? When I am disconcerted by the unpleasing aspects of existence, when for me, as for Hamlet, this fair creation turns to dust and stubble, it is not in Metaphysics nor in Religion that I seek reassurance, but in fine phrases. The thought of gazing on life's Evening Star makes of ugly old age a pleasing prospect; if I call Death mighty and unpersuaded, it has no terrors for me; I am perfectly content to be cut down as a flower, to flee as a shadow, to be swallowed like a snowflake on the sea. These similes soothe and effectually console me. I am sad only at the thought that Words must perish like all things mortal; that the most perfect metaphors must be forgotten when the human race is dust.

'But the iniquity of Oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy.'

DISENCHANTMENT

LIFE, I often thought, would be so different if I only had one; but in the meantime I went on fastening scraps of paper together with pins.

Opalescent, infinitely desirable, in the window of a stationer's shop around the corner, gleamed the paste-pot of my daydreams. Every day I passed it, but every day my thoughts were distracted by some hope or disenchantment, some metaphysical perplexity, or giant preoccupation with the world's woe.

And then one morning my pins gave out. I met this crisis with manly resolution; putting on my hat, I went round the corner and bought three paste-pots and calmly took them home. At last the spell was broken; but Oh, at what a cost!

Unnerved and disenchanted, I sat facing those pots of nauseating paste, with nothing to wait for now but death.

ASK ME NO MORE

WHERE are the snows of yesteryear? Ask me no more the fate of Nightingales and Roses, and where the old Moons go, or what becomes of last year's Oxford Poets.

FAME

SOMEWHAT furtively I bowed to the new Moon in Knightsbridge; the little old ceremony was a survival, no doubt, of dark superstition, but the Wish that I breathed was an inheritance from a much later epoch. 'Twas an echo of Greece and Rome, the ideal ambition of poets and heroes; the thought of it seemed to float through the air in starlight and music; I saw in a bright constellation those stately Immortals; their great names rang in my ears.

'May I, too,—' I whispered, incredulous, as I lifted my hat to the unconcerned Moon.

IN spite of the delicacy of my moral feelings, and my unrelaxed solicitude for the maintenance of the right principles of conduct, I find I can read without tears of the retired Colonels who forge cheques, and the ladies of unexceptionable position who are caught pilfering furs in shops. Somehow the sudden lapses of respected people, odd indecorums, backbitings, bigamies, embezzlements, and attempted chastities—the surprising leaps they make now and then out of propriety into the police-courts—somehow news-items of this kind do not altogether—how shall I put it?—well, they don't absolutely blacken the sunshine for me.

And Clergymen? If a Clergyman slips up, do not, I pray you, gentle Reader, grieve on my account too much.

JOY

SOMETIMES at breakfast, sometimes in a train or empty bus, or on the moving stairs at Charing Cross, I am happy; the earth turns to gold, and life becomes a magical adventure. Only yesterday, travelling alone to Sussex, I became light-headed with this sudden joy. The train seemed to rush to its adorable destination through a world new-born in splendour, bathed in a beautiful element, fresh and clear as on the morning of Creation. Even the coloured photographs of South Coast watering-places in the railway carriage shone with the light of Paradise upon them. Brighton faced me; next to it divine Southsea beckoned; then I saw the beach at Sidmouth, the Tilly Whim caves near Swanage—was it in those unhaunted caves, or amid the tumult of life which hums about the Worthing bandstand, that I should find Bliss in its quintessence?

Or on the pier at St. Peter Port, perhaps, in the Channel Islands, amid that crowd who watch in eternal ecstasy the ever-arriving never-disembarking Weymouth steamer?

IN ARCADY

WHEN I retire from London to my rural solitudes, and taste once more, as always, those pure delights of Nature which the Poets celebrate—walks in the unambitious meadows, and the ever-satisfying companionship of vegetables and flowers—I am nevertheless haunted now and then (but tell it not to Shelley's Skylark, nor whisper to Wordsworth's Daffodils, the disconcerting secret)—I am incongruously beset by longings of which the Lake Poets never sang. Echoes and images of the abandoned City discompose my arcadisings: I hear, in the babbling of brooks, the delicious sound of London gossip, and newsboys' voices in the cries of birds. Sometimes the gold-splashed distance of a country lane seems to gleam at sunset with the posters of the evening papers; I dream at dawn of dinner-invitations, when, like a telephone-call, I hear the Greenfinch trill his electric bell.

WORRIES

IN the woods about my garden and familiar precincts lurk the fears of life; all threaten me, some I may escape, of others I am the destined and devoted victim. Sooner or later—and yet in any case how soon!—I shall fall, as I have seen others fall, touched by an unseen hand.

But I do not think of these Terrors often, though I seem to hear them sometimes moving in the thickets. It is the little transitory worries that bite and annoy me, querulous insects, born of the moment, and perishing with the day.

THINGS TO WRITE

WHAT things there are to write, if one could only write them! My mind is full of gleaming thoughts; gay moods and mysterious, moth-like meditations hover in my imagination, fanning their painted wings. They would make my fortune if I could catch them; but always the rarest, those freaked with azure and the deepest crimson, flutter away beyond my reach.

The childish and ever-baffled chase of these filmy nothings often seems, for one of sober years in a sad world, a trifling occupation. But have I not read of the great Kings of Persia who used to ride out to hawk for butterflies, nor deemed this pastime beneath their royal dignity?

PROPERTY

I SHOULD be very reluctant to think that there was anything fishy or fraudulent about the time-honoured institution of Private Property. It is endorsed by Society, defended by the Church, maintained by the Law; and the slightest tampering with it is severely punished by Judges in large horsehair wigs. Oh, certainly it must be all right; I have a feeling that it is all right; and one of these days I will get some one to explain why the world keeps on putting adequate sums of its currency into my pocket.

But of course it's all right—

IN A FIX

TO go, or not to go? Did I want or not want to bicycle over to tea with the Hanbury-Belchers at Pokemore? Wouldn't it be pleasanter to stay at home?

I liked the Hanbury-Belchers—

Or did I really like them?

Still, it might be pleasant?

But how beforehand can one ever tell? Experience? I was still, I felt, as ignorant of life as a newborn infant; experience has taught me nothing; what I needed was some definite, a priori principle, some deep conception of the meaning of existence, in the light of which problems of this kind would solve themselves at once.

I leant my bicycle against the gate, and sat down to think the matter out. Calling to mind the moral debates of the old philosophers, I meditated on that *Summum Bonum,* or Sovereign Felicity of which they argued; but from their disputes and cogitations what came back most vividly—what seemed to fall upon one almost in a hush of terror—was that paralysis or dread balance of desire they imagined; the predicament in fact of that philosophic quad-

ruped, who, because he found in each of them precisely the same attraction, stood, unable to move, between two bundles of hay, until he perished of hunger.

NO! I don't like it; I can't approve of it; I have always thought it most regrettable that serious and ethical Thinkers like ourselves should go scuttling through space in this undignified manner. Is it seemly that I, at my age, should be hurled, with my books of reference, and bed-clothes, and hot-water bottle, across the sky at the unthinkable rate of nineteen miles a second? As I say, I don't at all like it. This universe of astronomical whirligigs makes me a little giddy.

That God should spend His eternity—which might be so much better employed—in spinning countless Solar Systems, and skylarking, like a great child, with tops and teetotums—is not this a serious scandal? I wonder what all our circumgyrating Monotheists really do think of it?

THE EVIL EYE

DRAWN by the unfelt wind in my little sail over the shallow estuary, I lay in my boat, lost in a dream of mere existence. The cool water glided through my trailing fingers; and leaning over, I watched the sands that slid beneath me, the weeds that languidly swayed with the boat's motion. I was the cool water, I was the gliding sand and the swaying weeds, I was the sea and sky and sun, I was the whole vast Universe.

Then between my eyes and the sandy bottom a mirrored face looked up at me, floating on the smooth film of water over which I glided. At one look from that too familiar, and yet how sinister and goblin a face, my immeasurable soul collapsed like a wrecked balloon; I shrank sadly back into my named personality, and sat there, shabby, hot, and very much bored with myself in my little boat.

THE EPITHET

'OCCULT, night-wandering, enormous, honey-pale—'

The morning paper lay there unopened; I knew I ought to look at the news, but I was too busy just then trying to find an adjective for the Moon—the magical, unheard of, moony epithet, which, could I only find or invent it, what then would matter the sublunary quakes and conflicts of this negligible earth?

'YES, I suppose it is rather a dull Garden Party,' I agreed, though my local pride was a little hurt by the disdain of that visiting young woman for our rural society. 'Still we have some interesting neighbours, when you get to know them. Now that fat lady over there in purple—do you see her? Mrs. Turnbull—she believes in Hell, believes in Eternal Torment. And that old gentleman with whiskers and white spats is convinced that England is tottering on the very brink of the abyss. The pie-faced lady he is talking to was, she asserts, Mary Queen of Scots in a previous existence. And our Curate—we're proud of our Curate—he's a great cricketer, and a kind of saint as well. They say he goes out in Winter at three o'clock in the morning, and stands up to his neck in a pond, praying for sinners.'

'HOW depressed you look! What on earth's the matter?'

'Central Europe,' I said, 'and the chaos in China is something awful. There's a threatened shortage, too, of beer in Copenhagen.'

'But why should that worry you?'

'It doesn't. It's what I said to Mrs. Rumbal—I do say such idiotic things! She asked me to come to see them. "I shall be delighted," I said, "as delighted—"

'But it's your fault for lending me that book of Siamese translations!—"as delighted," I said, "Mrs. Rumbal, as a royal flamingo, when he alights upon a cluster of lotuses."'

I REMEMBER how charmed I was with these new acquaintances, to whose house I had been taken that afternoon to call. I remember the gardens through which we sauntered, with peaches ripening on the sunny walls; I remember the mellow light on the old portraits in the drawing-room, the friendly atmosphere and tranquil voices; and how, as the quiet stream of talk flowed on, one subject after another was pleasantly mirrored on its surface—till, at a chance remark, there was a sudden change and darkening, an angry swirl, as if a monster were raising its head above the waters.

What was it about, the dreadful disputation into which we were plunged, in spite of desperate efforts to clutch at other subjects? Was it Tariff Reform or Table-rapping,—Bacon and Shakespeare, Disestablishment, perhaps—or Anti-Vivisection? What did any of us know or really care about it? What force, what fury drove us into saying the stupid, intolerant, denunciatory things we said; that made us feel we would rather die than not say them? How could a group of humane, polite and intelligent people be so suddenly transformed into barking animals?

Why do we let these Abstractions and implacable Dogmatisms take possession of us, glare at each other through our eyes, and fight their frenzied conflicts in our persons? Life without the rancours and ever-recurring battles of these Bogeys might be so simple, friendly, affectionate and pleasant!

LIFE-ENHANCEMENT

I WAS simply telling them at tea the details of my journey—how late the train had been in starting, how crowded the railway carriage, how I had mislaid my umbrella, and nearly lost my Gladstone bag.

But how I enjoyed making them listen, what a sense of enhanced existence I found it gave me (and to think that I have pitied bores!) to force my doings, my interests, my universe, with my bag and umbrella, down their throats!

ECLIPSE

A MILD radiance and the scent of flowers filled the drawing-room, whose windows stood open to the summer night. I thought our talk delightful; the topic was one of my favourite topics; I had much that was illuminating to say about it, and I was a little put out when we were called to the window to look at the planet Jupiter, which was shining in the sky just then, we were told, with great brilliance.

In turns through a telescope we gazed at that planet: I thought the spectacle over-rated, but said nothing. Not for the world, not for any number of worlds would I have wished them to guess why I was displeased with that glittering star.

'TO read Gibbon,' I said as we paced that terrace in the sunshine, 'to peruse his metallic, melancholy pages, and then forget them; to re-read and re-forget the *Decline and Fall;* to fill the mind with that great, sad, meaningless panorama of History, and then to watch it fade from the memory as it has faded from the glass of time—'

As she turned to me with a glance full of enthusiasm, 'What is so enchanting,' I asked myself, 'as the dawn of an acquaintance with a lovely woman with whom one can share one's thoughts?'

But those dawns are too often false dawns.

It was her remark about History, how she believed the builders of the Great Pyramid had foreseen and foretold many events of Modern History, which made a gigantic shadow, a darkness, as of Egypt, loom between us on that terrace.

THE FULL MOON

SUDDENLY one night, low above the trees, we saw the great, amorous, unabashed face of the full Moon. It was an exhibition that made me blush, feel that I had no right to be there. 'After all these millions of years, she ought to be ashamed of herself!' I cried.

IN a field of that distant, half-neglected farm, I found an avenue of great elms leading to nothing. But I could see where the wheat-bearing earth had been levelled into a terrace; and in one corner there were broken, overgrown, garden gateposts, almost hid among great straggling trees of yew.

This, then, was the place I had come to see. Here had stood the great palladian house or palace, with its terraces, and gardens, and artificial waters; this field had once been the favourite resort of Eighteenth-Century Fashion; the Duchesses and Beauties had driven hither in their gilt coaches, and the Beaux and Wits of that golden age of English Society. And although the house had long since vanished, and the plough had gone over its pleasant places, yet for a moment I seemed to see this fine company under the green and gold of that great avenue; seemed to hear their gossiping voices as they passed on into the shadows.

AS I came away from the Evening Service, walking home from that Sabbath adventure, some neighbours of mine passed me in their motor, laughing. Were they laughing at me? I wondered uneasily; and as I sauntered across the fields I vaguely cursed those misbelievers. Yes, yes, their eyes should be darkened, and their lying lips put to silence. They should be smitten with the botch of Egypt, and a sore botch in the legs that cannot be healed. All the teeth should be broken in the mouths of those bloody men and daughters of backsliding; their faces should become as flames, and their heads be made utterly bald. Their little ones should be dashed to pieces before their eyes, and brimstone scattered upon their habitations. They should be led away with their buttocks uncovered; they should stagger to and fro as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit.

But as for the Godly Man who kept his Sabbaths, his should be the blessings of those who walk in the right way. 'These blessings' —the words came back to me from the Evening Lesson—'these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.' And suddenly, in the mild summer air, it seemed as if, like a swarm

of bees inadvertently wakened, the blessings of the Bible were actually rushing after me. From the hot, remote, passionate past of Hebrew history, out of the Oriental climate and unctuous lives of that infuriate people, gross good things were coming to overwhelm me with benedictions for which I had not bargained. Great oxen and camels and concubines were panting close behind me, he-goats and she-goats and rams of the breed of Bashan. My barns should burst their doors with plenty, and all my paths drop fatness. My face should be smeared with the oil of rejoicing; all my household and the beasts of my household should beget and bear increase; and as for the fruit of my own loins, it should be for multitude as the sands of the sea and as the stars of heaven. My little ones should be as olive plants around my table; sons and daughters, and their sons and daughters to the third and fourth generation, should rise up and call me blessed. My feet should be dipped in butter, and my eyes stand out with fatness; I should flourish as the Cedar of Lebanon that bringeth forth fruit in old age.

THE SONNET

IT came back to me this rainy afternoon for no reason, the memory of another afternoon long ago in the country, when, at the end of an autumn day, I had stood at the rain-dashed window and gazed out at the dim landscape; and as I watched the yellowing leaves blown about the garden, I had seen a flock of birds rise above the half-denuded poplars and wheel in the darkening sky. I had felt there was a mysterious meaning in that moment, and in that flight of dim-seen birds an augury of ill-omen for my life. It was a mood of Autumnal, minor-poet melancholy, a mood with which, it had occurred to me, I might fill out the rhymes of a lugubrious sonnet.

But my Sonnet about those birds—those Starlings, or whatever they were—will, I fear, never be written now. For how can I now recapture the sadness, the self-pity of youth?

Alas! What do the compensations of age after all amount to? What joy can the years bring half so sweet as the unhappiness they take away?

WELTANSCHAUUNG

WHEN, now and then, on a calm night I look up at the Stars, I reflect on the wonders of Creation, the unimportance of this Planet, and the possible existence of other worlds like ours. Sometimes it is the self-poised and passionless shining of those serene orbs which I think of; sometimes Kant's phrase comes into my mind about the majesty of the Starry Heavens and the Moral Law; or I remember Xenophanes gazing at the broad firmament, and crying, 'All is One!' and thus, in that sublime exclamation, enunciating for the first time the great doctrine of the Unity of Being.

But these Thoughts are not my thoughts; they eddy through my mind like scraps of old paper, or withered leaves in the wind. What I really feel is the survival of a much more primitive mood—a view of the world which dates indeed from before the invention of language. It has never been put into literature; no poet has sung of it, no historian of human thought has so much as alluded to it; astronomers in their glazed observatories, with their eyes glued to the ends of telescopes, seem to have had no notion of it.

But sometimes, far off at night, I have heard a dog howling it at the Moon.

THE ALIEN

THE older I grow, the more of an alien I find myself in the world; I cannot get used to it, cannot believe that it is real. I think I must have been made to live on some other Star. Or perhaps I am subject to hallucinations and hear voices; perhaps what I seem to see is delusion and doesn't happen; perhaps people don't really say the things I think I hear them saying.

Ah, some one ought to have told me when I was young, I should certainly have been told of the horrible songs that are sung in drawing-rooms; they ought to have warned me about the great fat women who suddenly get up and bellow out incredible recitations.

HYPOTHESES

I GOT up with Stoic fortitude of mind in the cold this morning; but afterwards, in my hot bath, I joined the school of Epicurus. I was a Materialist at breakfast; after it an Idealist, as I smoked my first cigarette and turned the world to transcendental vapour. But when I began to read the *Times* I had no doubt of the existence of an external world.

So all the morning and all the afternoon opinions kept flowing into and out of the receptacle of my mind; till, by the time the enormous day was over, it had been filled by most of the widely-known Theories of Existence, and then emptied of them.

THE ARGUMENT

THIS long speculation of life, this thinking and syllogising that always goes on inside me, this running over and over of hypothesis and surmise and supposition—one day this infinite Argument will have ended, the debate will be forever over, I shall have come to an indisputable conclusion, and my brain will be at rest.

THE END

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